DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 055 JC 990 547

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TITLE Alternative Assessments for Accelerative Learning Classes.
INSTITUTION Learning Strategies Corp., Wayzata, MN.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; *Learning Strategies; *Multiple Intelligences; Role of Education; Student Evaluation; Student Needs; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Assessment

ABSTRACT

With the advent of accelerative learning changing the teaching paradigm, it is important to establish more effective ways of evaluating and assessing learning competencies. Alternative assessments are necessary because: (1) all learning needs to be placed into the larger context of the real world; (2) the ultimate purpose of education is for the learners to be productive contributing members of society; and (3) assessments are not tricks, hurdles, or a mere "spitting-out" of memorized facts, but simply feedback to learners and educators that learning has occurred. Alternative and authentic assessments are defined as methods of measuring the end product of learning and competencies in real-life or simulated real-life situations. This paper examines how they impact the role of the teacher as facilitator and coach to the learner in sharing the "big picture." It also discusses how educators can develop authentic alternative assessments by starting at the end, recognizing assessment as positive feedback, building in continuous learning, measuring characteristics of learning, and planning logical learning steps. Alternative assessment examples are provided, such as rubrics, portfolio, projects, performance, games and competitions, and multiple evaluators. Questions to consider in creating and selecting assessment methods are presented, as are the benefits of using alternative and authentic assessments. (VWC)

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Alternative Assessments for Accelerative Learning Classes

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Introduction

With the advent of accelerative learning changing the teaching paradigm it is important to establish more effective ways of evaluating and assessing learning competencies. Many educators are embracing Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences as a means of recognizing and acknowledging learner differences. Using them validates learners' whose learning styles have been overlooked or undervalued. However, if educators continue to use traditional "paper and pencil" tests methods . what is gained in teaching is lost in testing. This paper looks at why new ways of assessing are necessary, what these alternative assessments are, how they impact the roles of the teacher and learner, how educators can achieve authentic assessments, and makes suggestions for getting started.

A case for change

Alternative assessments are necessary for these reasons:
1) All learning needs to be placed into the larger context of the real world.
2) The ultimate purpose of education is for the learners to be a productive contributing members of society.
3) Assessments are not tricks, hurdles, or a mere spitting out memorized facts, but feedback to learners and educators that learning has occurred.

Learning is lifelong and happens in the open system of the world, not in the closed system of the classroom. Educators need to continually facilitate learning and set the stage for all future learning. They must provide learners with the "big picture" of the subjects they teach and continually connect each learning unit to the next one and to the "big picture." Learning, like threads, must be carefully woven together to be a useful fabric.

Alternative and authentic assessment defined

Alternative assessments that measure specific competencies are purposeful and systematic methods of measuring learners' progress regardless of **how they learned**. Alternative assessments provide evidence that learning took place. Different from traditional "paper and pencil" tests which measure what is readily measurable and focuses on "one right answer or way," authentic assessments comprehensively measure knowledge, behaviors, and skills. Authentic assessments measure the end product of learning along with the process. They are methods of measuring competencies in real life or simulated real life situations. When learning and assessing is placed in life-relevant contexts it makes information and skills easier to understand and transfer to the real world.

Roles: Instructor & Learner

Assessing is everybody's responsibility

As in real life, the efforts of many are often required to achieve success. Threrefore, assessments need to reflect real world applications. Traditional teaching and assessing have allowed the educator to be solely in charge of what is taught and how

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the learners are assessed.
The work place requires cooperation and collaboration. Alternative and authentic assessments incorporate self-assessment, individual performance, and group performance. Learners need assessment skills to effectively assess their own learning progress and the progress of others. By having learners develop the skills of assessing they will take on more active roles.

Facilitator and coach
As the learners take on more active roles, the educator's role shifts to one of a coach and facilitator, resulting in cooperative efforts between the educator and learners. The facilitator's role is to bring out the best in each learner. With alternative assessments, educators recognize that there are multiple learning styles and intelligences. Learners' minds vary as much as learners' body shapes, sizes, and appearances. Teachers need to begin accepting learners as brilliant and capable based on their individual learning styles and developed intelligences. Learning styles and intelligences differences occur because of individual experiences, environment, and biology. Learners prefer to learn in one of three styles: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. They, also, develop strengths in eight types of intelligences: linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, body/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. For example, a student who comes from a musically inclined family could benefit from the use of music, songs, and rhythms to learn math or learn the rules of spelling. This incorporates the already developed auditory skills (hearing and listening to music) and kinesthetic skills (playing music.) Alternative assessments will accommodate a wider range of learners.

Sharing the "big picture"
The role of the educator is to provide a "big picture" perspective for the learner. If we are expecting our learners to be whole brained, creative problem solvers possessing higher-thinking abilities we must use the whole mind thinking and envisioning. The "big picture" is needed as a reference to invoke the whole mind, the global perspective, and the specific details. This is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. An efficient method of putting one together is to: 1) have a picture of the completed puzzle as a reference, 2) put the frame together so the size and shape of the puzzle is known, 3) group the individual pieces together in categories of color and content, 4) first put together easily identifiable figures and images, and 5) finish with the smallest details. Learning is the same. If learners do not know what is expected of them, how can they be expected to perform?

Developing Assessments

Start at the end
In developing alternative assessments, the ending point is the beginning. Asking and answering questions about what the learners will need by the end of their learning gives a clear indication of what is to be measured. It is from these questions that competencies are identified, written, and taught. What does the learners need to know

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and why? How will they need to perform the skills? How will they behave once they have this knowledge and skills? What will they need to do with this knowledge or skills? Where and how will they apply the information? What mental models will they need? What are the attitudes and beliefs the learner will possess after learning this information? After gathering this information educators can then identify the assessment competencies.

Assessment as positive feedback

Assessment is frequently viewed as negative. Test anxiety is a real phenomenon and does affect results. The purpose of assessment is to evaluate the learners' progress against a given set of standards and to determine teaching effectiveness. "One right answer and way" assessments increase the opportunity for failure and are contrary to the goals of education. The objective of learning is to get the maximum number of learners to succeed. Assessment must be designed as positive reinforcement, not negative. It is important for learners to want to be assessed. Shifting the focus of assessment from negative to positive will help learners appreciate the importance of feedback, place it in its proper context, and allow learners to concentrate on learning.

Build in continuous learning, kaizen

Because learning is a lifelong process, educators will want to provide ways for learners to continue their learning. Kaizen or continuous improvement is the educators' friend. Since learners learn at different rates, teaching must accommodate continual learning. If some learners did not learn something and they need it for the next unit, essentially their learning has stopped. It is not the role of the educator to stop learning but to provide means for learners to continue learning and improving.

Measure characteristics of learning

There are seven characteristics of learning which are identified by Eric Jensen in his book Completing the puzzle. These seven characteristic serve as a framework for educators while creating assessments. Characteristics to measure are: behavioral changes, subject biases which are both attitudinal and perceptual, content mastery, skill sets and strategies, transferability or generalization of information to other situations, mental models which are ways of thinking about something, and personal integration and connection to the usefulness of the information.

Logical learning steps

Learning only takes place when new information is linked or connected to previously learned or known information. Learning then needs to have logic and sequence that helps learners build connections from already learned to new information. Educators need to use well planned and paced learning procedures.

Alternative assessment examples

Rubrics

This assessment is created by identifying the individual skills, tasks, and knowledge

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needed for mastery. The rubrics is then a series of evaluations within the overall assessment. These are essentially comprehensive assessments of a total set of skills. An example is where learners use complex problem-solving skills, technical skills, and where multiple skill sets are combined. A rubrics assessment example is writing a paper, creating or selecting related visuals or metaphors, and giving a speech on the subject.

Portfolio
This assessment is an accumulation of projects, activities, and previous assessments that are combined to form an historical perspective of a learner's progress. These are especially valuable in charting progress, strengths, weakness, and learner's learning pace. Journals, sketch books and activity sheets, and workbooks are all form of portfolios.

Projects
Assessment begins whenever learners can produce an end product using their learned skills and knowledge. Anytime learners can build, draw, make, create, draft, or produce something, it becomes a useful method of authentic assessment. Obviously, vocational and technical schools incorporate these assessments. Academic educators can incorporate more of these assessments to more effectively include spatial and body/kinesthetic intelligences.

Performance
These assessments provide both the learner and the instructor concrete evidence of how the learner performs specific tasks. Common examples of performance assessments are keyboarding, sales, and speaking. When I compare my college speech class experience to Toastmasters, it was in Toastmasters where I learned effective speaking skills. In college I gave only 3 speeches in 15 weeks. In the same time in Toastmasters I gave 3 speeches, 4 speaker evaluations, 5 extemporaneous talks, and was once the meeting toastmaster. These multiple vantage points helped me develop my skills faster and more effectively.

Games and competitions
Fun learning assessments helps bring joy to classrooms and create positive attitudes toward assessments. In assessment games, learners can compete with each other or compete as teams to answer and demonstrate their knowledge. This is especially helpful in subjects areas where quick thinking and response time are important. Some game examples are Jeopardy, Name that ..., and Monopoly.

Multiple Evaluators
As in my Toastmasters, example by evaluating others' speeches and being given multiple evaluations as a speaker, I learned how to give effective speeches. Since speaking does not happen in a vacuum, it is worthwhile to find out what the audience thought about the speech, the content, and delivery. Learners will ultimately need to

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accept and give feedback from peers, managers, and subordinates. Having learners do self-assessments and peer assessments helps them develop the ability to realistically assess their own and others' knowledge and skills.

Choice of assessments

Preferably when making assessments it is important to incorporate all of the learning styles and intelligences needed to use the information. However, there are a few situations where giving learners the choice of assessment is useful. One is for single channel learners (learn only using one style: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.) These learners translate everything into one learning style. In these (infrequent) cases allowing learners to select the assessment method that best suits their style can significantly improve their results. Another is if the skill or knowledge being assessed has the same value regardless of how it is measured. An example would be pictorially depicting an historical event, verbally describing the same event, or producing and performing it as a play.

Creating and selecting assessment methods

Here is a series of questions to use for building alternative assessments. How can I incorporate all 3 learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic? How can I include the highest number of intelligences: linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, body/kinesthetic, interpersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist? If this is being used in the real world, who would be assessing this learner? In real life settings who else would be involved? What is the ideal standards of performance for these skills at this level (beginning, intermediate, advanced, etc.) and grade level? Where will these skills be used in the real world?

Once this information is gathered then it is possible to recognize all of the essential competencies to be assessed. To create authentic assessments, educators will want to select an assessment that effectively measures the highest number of skills as well as the level of knowledge needed while incorporating multiple intelligences and learning styles. The learners' results are then compared to performance standards and arenot used to compare the learners to each other. If the assessment does not provide a reasonable amount of acceptable grades then the assessment needs to be revised. The learning activities or the standards used may need adjusting. Often times it is a combination of them.

Summary

Using alternative assessments, where previously traditional "paper and pencil" tests were used, requires an adjustment period. Educators take on a new roles, train and coach learners in the use of assessing skills, and ultimately will alter their teaching methods. The benefits of using alternative and authentic assessments are that it: 1) begins the process of transforming the educational model from teacher focused to learned focused, 2) honors and respects all learning styles and intelligences, 3)

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energizes and revitalizes teachers and learners as fun and excitement are brought to the classroom, 4) increases learner participation and involvement and ,5) increases the learner retention, understanding and grades.

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